

## PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 28 April 2023 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.30 pm

**Present:**

**Voting Members:** Councillor Eddie Reeves – in the Chair  
Councillor Michael O'Connor (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Brad Baines  
Councillor Donna Ford  
Councillor Damian Haywood  
Councillor Bob Johnston  
Councillor Kevin Bulmer (In place of Councillor Kieron Mallon)  
Councillor Robin Bennett (In place of Councillor Middleton)

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillor Glynis Phillips

**Officers:** Martin Reeves, Chief Executive  
Lorna Baxter, Director of Finance  
Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Strategy, Insight, and Communications  
Kerry Middleton, Head of Comms, Marketing and Engagement  
Carole Stow, Consultation and Engagement Manager  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager  
Marco Dias, Scrutiny Officer

*The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting [, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting/the following additional documents:] and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports [agenda, reports and schedule/additional documents] are attached to the signed Minutes.*

### 9/21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS** (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies received from Cllr Mallon (Cllr Bulmer substituting) and Cllr Middleton (Cllr Bennett substituting). It was noted that Cllr Haywood would be joining the meeting late.

**10/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE ON THE BACK PAGE**

(Agenda No. 2)

None

**11/21 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee resolved to **AGREE** the minutes as a true and accurate record.

**12/21 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

Richard Parnham addressed the Committee in relation to item 6, the Council's Communications and Engagement Strategy and gave what he described as "a personal view from a weary, annoyed, resident."

Mr Parnham highlighted the Government's Consultation Principles 2018. Mr Parnham reminded the Committee of the Gunning Principles which set out that a consultation was only legitimate when all principles were met:

- Proposals are still at a formative stage;
- There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration';
- There is adequate time for consideration and response;
- 'Conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made.

Mr Parnham called on the Council to improve its approach to consultation considerably. Mr Parnham called for the Council to engage with a wider range of people and to stress test the initial idea with a greater variety of stakeholders. Mr Parnham expressed scepticism that the Council would modify any plans in response to consultation feedback unless it was required to do so.

Mr Parnham called for transparency and rigour when preparing documents for consultation and emphasised the need for clarity and succinctness. Mr Parnham called for the Council to stop running consultations with too short a duration and during school holidays. Mr Parnham criticised the Council for running consultations on similar subjects concurrently or in rapid succession. This was insulting to residents and indicated that changes would not arise as a result of feedback.

He concluded by calling on the Council to:

1. Include clear 'support/oppose' options and to publish the results of those;
2. Draw on the 'support/oppose' response and consider potential impacts on particular groups as part of Equalities Impact Assessments;
3. Inform those who have responded of the policy outcome of the item being consulted upon.

The Chair thanked Mr Parnham for his contribution and explained that any questions that had arisen would be considered under agenda item 6.

## 13/21 2023/24 OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK (Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, and Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Strategy, Insight, and Communications, attended for this item.

Cllr Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, introduced the item and explained that, as part of the annual business planning review process, the Council's strategic priorities and key performance indicators (KPIs) had been addressed. Cllr Phillips reminded the Committee that the nine strategic priorities had been grouped into three following engagement with, and feedback from, residents.

Following feedback from the Committee last year, the number of KPIs was reduced from more than 100 to 27. They were outcome-focused with the intention of them being SMART. Operational measures were kept at a service level which continued to be captured and reported on with the suite of measures intended to be fluid.

Final outturn data was intended to be taken to Cabinet in June 2023 and the measures would be continued to be reviewed and potentially revised with any changes being reported bi-monthly. More detailed measures and data were contained in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Whether the objectives were sufficiently detailed in order to track progress;
- The lack of clarity as to how the Key Performance Indicators and Performance Measures related to the objectives;
- Whether the information could be presented more appropriately in a visual format, demonstrating how they were linked but also including measures that were relevant but not wholly covered by a particular objective;
- That each KPI had an action plan linked to it but that standardised reporting timeframes would aid tracking;
- That partnership working with other authorities and agencies was essential to achieve any objectives and the links between health inequalities, educational outcomes, and economic success were well-documented;
- How consultation data was measured and monitored, particularly of those who received social care;
- Underlying data sets being accessible would have been useful;
- Some measures that were not included seemed both important and relevant and consideration should be given to including them.

The Committee resolved to make the following observations to Cabinet:

- The need for justification for removed indicators from last time;
- The need for clarification over the data sets which underpin the KPIs
- Clarification how the KPIs link to the objectives and whether they're specific targets (must) or broader measures (that are done in partnership – life expectancy)

- Clarifying the degree to which the Council has influence over its objectives owing to the need for partnership working – may need
- Transparency is improved by more standardised reporting timeframes wherever possible
- Alternatives to add/think of:
  - Material measure around poverty
  - Nature recovery
  - Travel to school
  - Satisfaction of users in social care
  - Modal share targets
  - Vision Zero
  - Bus frequency/coverage
- Where is information captured and where it is available?
- Reminder that the motion is reflected in the Outcomes Framework to ensure embedded

## **14/21 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY** (Agenda No. 6)

Councillor Glynnis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, and Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Strategy, Insight, and Communications, Kerry Middleton, Head of Comms, Marketing and Engagement, and Carole Stow, Consultation and Engagement Manager, attended for this item.

Cllr Phillips introduced the report and highlighted that the strategy had two key aims:

- To engage with and listen to residents and other partners in a more active and inclusive way. This includes listening to what residents value most, involving them in conversations about the things that affect them, and then using that feedback to help shape or improve services.
- To widen the council's reach so that we listen to diverse communities and audiences. This includes those whose voices are seldom heard, such as young people and the digitally excluded.

There was a detailed action plan and table summarising progress against that under the headings of:

1. Building the right foundations;
2. Enabling two-way conversations;
3. Expanding the Council's reach and being inclusive.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Guidance had been drawn up for teams conducting consultations across the Council and the team was working hard to engage with services so that they were contacting the team and seeking its advice at the earliest opportunity. There was a network of officers who were able to provide the advice and spread the message more widely.
- The Council will be conducting its annual resident satisfaction survey and the Cabinet Member explained that she had asked for it to be sent to all members before it was issued and would be grateful for any feedback. She

explained that, in order to measure progress against previous years, it was important that the survey kept many of the same questions.

- Approximately 4500 people signed up to the new e-newsletter which was an additional mechanism for engagement, used alongside social media and video and not instead of them.
- A very limited number of officers was able to self-publish onto Let's Talk and so engagement with either the Communications team or with other programme teams was required.
- Let's Talk was commended as a good platform and there was discussion about whether it could be developed as an app which could highlight consultations that were relevant to residents, based on their address.
- A high number of consultation was felt to lead to 'consultation fatigue' and to lead to particular groups being more likely to participate rather than the wide swathe of the population that would be desirable.
- It was important for the Council to acknowledge the responses of those who responded to consultations and to feedback to them what the Council planned to do after the consultations had concluded. The distinction between consultation and engagement were highlighted as was the need to be clear when the Council was sharing information about its plans rather than seeking approval.
- Particularly for consultation exercises that were likely to be controversial, the idea of individual sign-off by Cabinet as an whole or by the relevant Cabinet member was raised. It was suggested that the Communications team could suggest a number of options but that, given the likely controversy, it should be a member decision as to which to deploy.

The Committee resolved to make the following observations and recommendations to Cabinet:

- A key observation around the diversity of the different layers of consultation and engagement and issues arising from that
  - Recognising the sheer number and burden of consultations and whether they're necessary – and the importance of explaining why they're happening
  - That it is paramount that the outcomes that can be expected. People will be listened to but doesn't mean they'll be able to stop policy
  - That too many consultations narrow the pool of respondees
  - The importance of ensuring the Council has the courtesy to respond to maximise engagement
1. That on contentious issues political leaders should be accountable for how the consultation process is undertaken rather than officers
  2. That the Council engages with partners and uses sampling to ensure broader populations
  3. That Let's Talk Oxfordshire be considered to be launched in app form.

## **15/21 LGA PEER REVIEW ON COMMS 6 MONTH UPDATE** (Agenda No. 7)

Councillor Glynnis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Strategy, Insight, and Communications, Kerry Middleton, Head of Comms, Marketing and Engagement, attended for this item.

Cllr Phillips introduced the report updating the Committee on progress made against the recommendations made in the LGA Peer Review on Communications and also on the observations made by the Committee in September 2022. The report set out the action plan relating to the seven recommendations.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Chief Executive and the Leader met on a fortnightly basis with the Director Communications. A member asked if it would be appropriate for the Deputy Leader to also join this meeting, given the nature of the coalition.
- Political awareness training had taken place for Communications staff, as called for in the report. This was a 90 minute long basic training and the team was seeking to consolidate that. Concerns were raised about politicisation of press releases whilst it was also noted that part of the communications strategy was to promote the Council's priorities.
- An overarching strategy had been put in place swiftly after the publication of the LGA report. The Council had recently undertaken a review and audit of video content and had recently added Next Door to the social media it employed. The Director of Communications, Strategy, and Insight highlighted that users of different media engaged with videos differently and the Council was keen to ensure that the content consequently differed across the suite.
- Preparedness for crisis management responding to online disinformation was greater than previously with strong partnership working.
- Responsibility for the Council's website lay with ICT rather than with Communications and the wisdom of that was questioned. It was noted that Communications were working much more closely with ICT than had previously been the case and had developed a close working relationship. The question they were exploring was how to move the website away from simply being a transactional one to something more engaging and useful for residents. It was explained that there had been changes to the music and to the recruitment sections of the website and that incremental improvements would continue.

The Committee resolved to make the following observations and recommendations to Cabinet:

- Concern over the potential politicisation of communications, for example as with potholes
- Priorities of the Council be embedded in the Council's communications
- The value of having a website led by Comms rather than ICT
- Embedding the learning about partnerships and networks
- That the action plan be reported on to the Committee
  
- That recognising the make-up of the Council, whether the Deputy Leader should be involved in meetings around Comms

The Scrutiny Manager apologised that the tracker had not been included owing simply to an oversight.

**17/21 CABINET RESPONSES TO PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES OSC RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee resolved to **NOTE** the responses.

**18/21 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

(Agenda No. 10)

There was some discussion as to whether the Social Value item could be brought to the meeting scheduled for 14 July 2023 and it was noted that the Committee would welcome a briefing from Cllr Phillips on the portal.

It was **AGREED** that the question of whether or not another meeting of the Committee needed to be scheduled should be considered by the Committee on 14 July, given the possibility of changes in the Committee’s membership after Annual Council on 16 May 2023.

Subject to these comments, the Work Plan was **AGREED**.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing ..... 200

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